

Please amend the Application as follows.

IN THE CLAIMS:

The present listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application.

Claims 1 - 7. (Cancelled)

Claim 8. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing a cellulose derivative having gel-like rheological properties in aqueous solution, comprising:

- a) alkalinizing cellulose with aqueous alkali metal hydroxide in the presence of a suspension medium;
- b) reacting the alkalinized cellulose with one or more alkylene oxides, thereby forming an alkalinized cellulose;
- c) reacting the alkalinized cellulose of step (b) with an alkyl halide present in the suspension medium;
- d) reacting subsequently or simultaneously with step (c) the alkalinized cellulose of step (c) with a crosslinking agent in an amount of 0.0001 to 0.05 eq, where the unit "eq" represents the molar ratio of crosslinking agent relative to the anhydroglucose unit (AGU) of the cellulose used, thereby forming an irreversibly crosslinked cellulose derivative;
- e) optionally adding a member selected from the group consisting of alkali metal hydroxide, alkylating agent and combinations thereof;
- f) optionally separating off the irreversibly crosslinked cellulose derivative from the reaction mixture; and

- g) optionally purifying and drying the isolated irreversibly crosslinked cellulose derivative.

Claim 9. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 8 wherein in step a), the cellulose is alkalized using aqueous alkali metal hydroxide in the presence of a suspension medium comprising alkyl halide in an amount calculated from the following formula:

[equivalents of alkali metal hydroxide per AGU minus 1.4]

to

[equivalents of alkali metal hydroxide per AGU plus 0.8],

and in step e) alkyl halide is added in an amount which is at least the difference between the number of equivalents of alkyl halide per AGU already added and the total amount of alkali metal hydroxide per AGU added, where this amount is a minimum of 0.2 equivalents per AGU, and, optionally, further alkali metal hydroxide.

Claim 10. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 8 wherein the alkyl halide is methyl chloride.

Claim 11. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 8 wherein the crosslinking agent is dissolved in solvent selected from the group consisting of methyl chloride and a mixture of methyl chloride and dimethyl ether.